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ABSTRACT

"Options in Education" is a radio program which focuses on issues and developments in education. This transcript of the show contains discussions on learning how to be Santa Claus and on the financial status of public school districts in Compton and Beverly Hills, California; Seattle, Washington; Columbus, Ohio; Madison, Wisconsin; and Montgomery County, Maryland. Participants in the program include John Merrow and Wendy Blair, moderators; John Ryor, of the National Education Association; reporter Connie Goldman; and representatives from the various school districts. (JM)

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TRANSCRIPT

WEEK OF DECEMBER 15, 1975

OPTIONS IN EDUCATION, an electronic weekly magazine devoted to coverage of news, features, policy and people in the field of education focuses this week on the financial status of five primary and secondary public school districts in various parts of the country.

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BLAIR: I am Wendy Blair with NPR's Options in Education. Options in Education is a news magazine about all the issues and developments in education, from the abc's of primary education to the alphabet soup of government programs. If you have ever been to school, we have something that will interest you.

Today on Options in Education we have good news and bad news. The bad news involves money, or the lack of it, in school systems around the country. The good news is that some things never change, especially around this time of year.

MERROW: I want you to tell me everything you know about Santa Claus.

CHILD: That he flies around in a sleigh with a big bag of toys and has this black belt around his waist.

MERROW: When does he come?

CHILD: Oh, he comes on December --

BLAIR: Public school systems around the country might very well be wishing that Santa Claus was in the taxes business as well as the toy business. These school systems have a Christmas list of some very basic needs that will go unfilled in the New Year, due in part to the same double digit inflation that has would-be Santa's shopping at discount toy stores.

We wanted to measure the financial health of these public school systems so we asked for reports from several NPR member stations. John Merrow is joined in the studio by John Ryor, President of the National Education Association.

BLAIR: In Los Angeles County there are 1,300,000 students attending 423 public schools. Doug Culver's report draws a sharp contrast between two of these schools.

CULVER: The city of Compton is about ten miles from downtown Los Angeles. Compton is best known for its extremely high crime rate and very high level of unemployment. Two years ago, teachers in the Compton unified school district went on strike. Seventeen days after the strike began, Compton teachers had a thirteen per cent pay increase package. Today the average teacher in Compton earns $16,000 a salary below the Southern California average. The superintendent of the school district Dr. Rodney Mahoney, says the strike settlement broke his operating budget. To keep operating Compton had to borrow $1,000,000 from the California State legislature. In order to pay back the loan, Dr. Mahoney has had to order severe cutbacks.

MAHONEY: If you borrow money and have to pay in back with interest, then the repayment plus the interest has to come out of your operating expenses. So we are paying back probably up to around $400,000 a year in order to repay our debt. This money could be utilized in the educational program. Certainly in the various curriculum areas, curriculum coordinators, special instructional personnel had to be cut, a tremendous number, something like 34 over a period of two or three years. Obviously staff has to be cut. We are working on next year's budget. We will probably work with 40 teachers less next year.

CULVER: There are 33,000 pupils in the Compton district or about 32 in every class. The district operates on a $49,000,000 budget, most of that money coming from the State of California. The budget is balanced this year, but just barely. Keeping the books in the black has not been easy for Compton. Dr. Mahoney admits his cuts have ended up hurting the quality of education in Compton.

MAHONEY: The quality of education in Compton certainly is not the

best, but I think it is good compared with the money we have, compared with the resources we have. Let me tell you this: Compton has been the whipping boy of the whole state as far as education is concerned. I am not being paranoid. This is a statement of fact. If anything happens in Compton we have all of the news media out here all over us and we are bad-mouthed from one end of the state to another. We in Compton are trying to certainly improve education. We are going to have to do it by pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps. We have learned long ago not to look to the State for any help. We have learned long ago not to look to the County. If we are going to do it, we are going to do it ourselves. I think this is the attitude we have in this district and this is the attitude we are going to pursue, because when we get through we are either going to do it by ourselves or we won't be able to do it at all.

CULVER: Ninety-seven per cent of the residents of Compton are members of minority groups. Superintendent of Compton schools, Rodney Mahoney says those residents take a great deal of interest in their school system. In fact, Dr. Mahoney says many residents think the budget crises may end up being beneficial.

MAHONEY: In many cases they feel that maybe it is a good thing, that maybe sometime or some place along the line we are going to have to stop and really spend only what you have. We did have to go to the residents of the community last year for a tax continuation election, we did pass the election by a two to one margin.

CULVER: Northwest of Compton is Beverly Hills. The school district there serves 5,700 students with 24 pupils to a class. While Compton struggles to get by with a $49,000,000 budget and a total expenditure of $1,500 per pupil, Beverly Hills is coasting, spending $2,000 per pupil on classroom education alone. The Beverly Hills budget is $17,000,000. Only $15,000,000 of that will be spent this school year. Rubin Cordova, the assistant superintendent in charge of Beverly Hills school financing says that all adds up to a pretty good financial picture.

CORDOVA: After all when you are spending twice the average there has to be something involved. We have a tremendous offering of courses which is one of the criteria of measurement of quality.

CULVER: But Beverly Hills is not without financial problems. The school district will begin collective bargaining with its teachers in a few months and those teachers will probably be looking for an increase over their $20,000 average salary. Dr. Cordova says the rising costs of goods and services has forced his district to weigh the merits of every expenditure and institute a serious conservation program.

CORDOVA: You can not operate under double digit inflation. No organization or individual can do so.

CULVER: Beverly Hills found conserving funds and supplies didn't solve enough of the financial crunch. So it went to the voters with a bond issue and a property tax increase proposal. Both measures were overwhelmingly approved. Dr. Cordova thinks that happened because the people in Beverly Hills have a special commitment to education.

CORDOVA: By and large the people who do come to Beverly Hills and pay the kind of money they do for their houses and their homes come primarily because of the schools. There is a commitment to education.

CULVER: The administrators in both the Beverly Hills and Compton districts say problems in financing schools are here to stay. But as different as the two districts are, Drs. Mahoney and Cordova agree on one thing, they can't fight inflation. And as long as the double digit variety is around to hang around, in the long run the quality of education is bound to suffer. For National Public Radio, this is Doug Culver reporting.

MERROW: Well, John Ryor, you are President of the National Education

Association, and I sat here and watched you as you listened to that report. I noticed that a couple of times you raised your eyebrows and a couple of times you made frowns and so on and so forth. What was going through your head as you heard those reports of a rich school district and a poor school district?

RYOR: I don't think you have to be Alexander Graham Bell to know when the phone is busy. You know, the examples given, Compton and Beverly Hills, simply point up a problem that I think is nation-wide. That is the whole concept that somehow our educational system, as poor as it is to a free society, is still being financed by Property Tax Referendum, by a system that I believe is really an anachronism, when in fact the only place that the property taxpayer has to vent their hostilities, when it is against education, or inflation or their own job condition or the price of food or whatever the case is, is at that polling place. Too often that has left school districts and public employment on the short end of a financial situation.

MERROW: You say this is a problem across the country. Are there such glaring examples as Compton and Beverly Hills all across this country?

RYOR: Oh yes, I think so. I think there is a glaring example but the difference between the per pupil expenditure in Compton and Beverly Hills was $1,500 per pupil as opposed to a little over $2,000. But the difference nationally is $891 per student spent in states like Kentucky and Mississippi -- it was lower than that the previous year -- to as high as almost $2,100 per pupil spent in New York. Now that is a glaring inequity. It seems to me that it speaks forcefully for the need for the federal government itself to take a more active part in financing.

MERROW: What does that mean "take a more active part"? More money?

RYOR: Well, more money. Right now only two cents of every tax dollar sent to Washington is spent on education programs and that program has been declining steadily since 1967.

MERROW: What would you like to see it at?

RYOR: Well, we believe that the federal government ought to be picking up in the neighborhood of one-third of the cost of education. Let me explain that. That does not mean just one-third new moneys into education. We are simply saying that because of the uncanny load that the local and state tax funds are required to put into education and public services, that the federal government itself has a responsibility, in our judgement, to relieve that; one, because there is such great disparity in the amount of money spent for each child and, secondly, because by and large the property tax itself as far as I know there is no responsible tax person left who's arguing that we are going to be able to keep up with inflation, much less the improvement, that by and large it is a matter of convincing the politicians that we must reorder our national priorities.

Everybody has also posed the question,"well, what are you going to do? How do we reorder that national priority?" I think again, it has been suggested that the federal military budget itself could stand as much as a one-third reduction in cost without damaging our military effort.

MERROW: But in fact budget cuts are not made on that kind of easy basis, as you know. If you want to spend more money on education you have to find it somewhere in social services generally, social welfare programs. You are not likely to get cuts in defense and have that money spent on education. That is just not a political reality.

RYOR: Well, I don't know whether it is a political reality or not.

I don't think we have ever made any sort of massive effort, until now, to bring that sort of thing to the attention of the federal government. I think now we are commited to it.

MERROW: Let's move on to a report on the situation in the City of Seattle and see what kind of themes keep appearing in these reports.

KVASNOSKY: The largest school district in the Pacific Northwest, the Seattle public schools, says, for them the current system of school aid just isn't working. The district has about 66,500 students this year. It is operating with a budget of $112.6 million. By its figures, it is spending $1,740 per student. About 60 per cent of their income comes from general and special state aid. Another seven per cent comes from the federal government and four per cent more from the local county. The large part of the balance, around 23 per cent, comes from local property taxes in the form of special operating levies.

This year that is the problem. About two-thirds of Washington State, including Seattle, failed to pass special levy elections with the necessary 60 per cent voter approval. That means some state residents will be paying a lot less in property taxes, but their local schools will be without a large part of their planned revenue. Special levies have two chances per year at the polling place. When the levy failed for the second time here this spring, the schools began paring their budget. Administrators sent out pink slips to some 2,800 teachers and other classified personnel. Orders for new books and supplies were canceled. Maintenance and training programs were let go. Some sports and activities were penciled out, the same for some counseling and library services. It was a grim summer vacation for the Seattle system.

But at least two things happened before school opened, to improve it. The state's part-time legislature came up with an emergency appropriations of $66,000,000. From that Seattle got 8.3 million dollars. And most district employees decided to pass up salary increases. That saved Seattle schools another 5.3 million dollars. That brought back some 1,700 staff members, mostly teachers, and left the budget only about 17 per cent short of its original amount.

If you visit a Seattle school, your first impression is that everything looks normal, not much different than last year. But administrators say, to see the biggest change, go into a classroom and count heads. In most of them there are more students per teacher this year. Evelyn Kelnover is a Language Arts teacher at Queen Ann High School. She says the budget cut left the school's 1,1216 students several teachers short, particularly in the important areas of reading and writing.

KELNOVER: So that means you have 35 students in a class to meet every day. There is not very many minutes each day if you even try to meet each student everyday. So that more or less puts every student back to more common experiences.

KVASNOSKY: Evelyn Kelnover likes her students to be with her when she corrects their papers. This year that can't happen. She says at first her students could accept the loss of her time but now she is losing them.

KELNOVER: They, in fact, were very understanding in the beginning because they thought that there was something they could do to help you. But they soon found out it was more difficult for them than they had any idea because they were facing what they consider failures because of their finding out that they were not at the same level as other people who were labeled the same as they were.

KVASNOSKY: The teachers at Queen Ann say that so far the students haven't lost enough to really feel the pinch of the tightening school budget. Teachers say next year's students may get their chance. In

the budget that the district is now preparing the anticipated revenue is about $75,000,000. That is $37,000,000 less than what they have now. The district has no reserve fund. Teachers are sure to ask for raises this time and Seattle faces the possibility of losing all its federal money over a minority staff issue. Just to keep things like they are would mean a special levy of $90,000,000. All sides agree, you can't get that kind of money from the Seattle community alone. Clarence Hein of the district's community relations staff, says that means a hard sell to legislatures and some serious looking into the idea of school reform.

HEIN: The school districts and the school employee groups have come to the point now where they realize that there has to be some visible and meaningful reform in school district operations that will have to come along with financing reform. My own feeling working in the school district for three years is that there is no public institution and probably very few private institutions that are as closely monitored, and whose finances are as closely watched and as well spent as school districts. But we are going to have to show that to people and we are going to have to demonstrate that we are educating children. The big concern is that people say children don't learn anything in school anymore. We have to point out that they are learning things.

KVASNOSKY: For National Public Radio, this is John KVASNOSKY in Seattle.

MERROW: Mr. Ryor, I hand it to you.

RYOR: We are back again to an inadequate system of financing public education in this country. When you look at Seattle and other large cities in this country and the problems they are facing, the whole notion of finance becomes even more compounded. That is why we believe that it is critical that that whole processes change. In the last years, every single social problem that has come down the pike has been laid at the doorsteps of public education.

MERROW: And the schools have been asked to solve them.

RYOR: The schools have been asked to deal with those and solve them. At the same time they have been asked to raise SAT scores, the cognitive scores, to relate to all of the problems of the child. And it is just impossible for the teacher to be nutritionist, psychologist, mother, father. When you take a look at the information laid out by the gentleman from Seattle, the tax base moves out of the city but the problems remain. The costs increase but the ability to pay goes down.

MERROW: Municipal overburden once again.

RYOR: I believe that.

MERROW: There was a financial thread I picked up. That had to do with school systems borrowing, deficit financing. Are many school systems forced to borrow?

RYOR: I think more and more of them are forced to borrow, forced to borrow against anticipated tax revenue which in most states is an acceptable practive. But what that means, and again pointing out something that the gentleman from Compton said earlier, that out of that general operating funds you must also pay the costs of the loan which runs very high these days.

MERROW: And gets more expensive every year.

RYOR: That is true. And if you are talking about four or five hundred thousand dollars expended just to pay the interest on the loan, you are talking about four or five hundred thousand dollars that can not

be invested in educational programs that are needed.

MERROW: What about teachers foregoing salary increases. Is there a trend?

RYOR: There has not been a trend in that. That has happened in a few places. I personally don't believe, and we don't believe, that is a good idea; to get into the process of the teachers and the employees themselves financing the education function is precisely what we have struggled out of over the last 10 to 15 years, that somehow you were viewed as a public servant and public servants and public servitude all became confused. There was just a general notion that, you know, it ought to be an honor that you could somehow live for less and have a special deal going with all of the vendors in the community, which was never true. Even today, our statistics demonstrate that the average teacher's salary is about $3,000 below what the federal government says is a necessary salary for a moderate standard of living for a family of four.

MERROW: That is a theme I am sure we will come back to as we go on. Let's go now to Columbus, Ohio, where things look a little better.

ALLEN: The Columbus public school system with a budget of 109.9 million dollars and an enrollment of about 95,000 students is expected to end this calendar year with over $5,000,000 to carry over into 1976; this despite the fact that the school district has not passed an additional tax levy since 1968. City school superintendent John Ellis says the condition of the school district is a reflection of the general physical well being of the Columbus area with its diversified economy. He also cites careful financial management of resources and increased aid from the state government as causes for the school system's operations in the black this year. In the past few years, in order to economize, the school administration has eliminated Art, Music, and Physical Education specialists in the elementary schools. For the last three years approximately 100 classroom teaching positions per year have been cut. But school superintendent John Ellis insists that the cuts have not affected the quality of education received by students in the city's school system.

ELLIS: We have been able to maintain the basic class size. The reductions have occured lightly because of the declining enrollment. When we have reduced classroom teachers we have also reduced the special personnel. There has been some reduction in quality, in the teaching of Art, Music and Physical Education in our elementary school for which we are very sorry. We have, however, been able to maintain the basic reading, writing and arithmetic programs. The specialists that we do have are doing an excellent job.

ALLEN: Superintendent Ellis's contentions are supported by officials of the Columbus Education Association representing the city system's nearly 5,000 teachers. They say that this year's system-wide average classroom size of 26.5 students actually represents an improvement over last year. CEA executive director, Jack Burgess, gives this interpretation of the Columbus school system physical policy.

BURGESS: For instance, if we were to have a complete program of Art, Music, and Physical Education special teachers, unless we cut somewhere else, we would not have 5 and a half million dollar carry over. Or if we had all of the educational aids that we need we would not have the carry over. If we bought the workbooks that teachers need for the elementary reading program so that the students didn't have to buy them we would not have a five and a half million dollar carry over. So these are not complaints, but it is just noting that we don't fund everything that is needed. But we have handled, the system has handled its funds carefully and conservatively and started new programs conservatively. So we have managed to have a carry over every year.

ALLEN: But with the end of that surplus, the Columbus public schools have also reached the point where further economizing may no longer be educationally feasible according to superintendent John Ellis.

ELLIS: You eventually reached the point where you have to cut back to substantially that you have to seriously question whether the quality of education is what one ought to be offering in a world that requires a good education if a student is going to survive.

ALLEN: The future as projected by Columbus school officials shows the city's system facing a potential revenue short fall of nearly $6,000,000 next year. The gap between estimated expences and revenues continues to widen in the ensuing years. The Columbus system's declining enrollment is causing concern among school officials because it may effect the level of state funding. Also, next spring the Columbus public school system goes to court on changes of racial discrimination brought by local families and the NAACP while the system to date has spend approximately $60,000 on legal defence, depending on the outcome, the school system could be faced with massive costs of carrying out a court order. One possible alternative to substantial cutbacks in personnel and programs according to school superintendent Ellis is to seek additional operating revenues through an increase in local property tax millage, which supplies about 60 per cent of the system's revenues.

The uncertainty of voter approval, however, is underlined by the fact that in the November election over 70 per cent of the school operating levies in Ohio failed to pass. Superintendent Ellis sums up the Columbus system's situation.

ELLIS: Our financial condition is created by the basic economics, not by any given acts, not by a strike, but by the fact that we are forced to operate in an economy that requires more money to do the same thing or to do less and we don't have the increased funds that are required.

ALLEN: For Options in Education, this is Kathleen Allen in Columbus, Ohio.

MERROW: Mr. Ryor, it seemed as we were listening the thing that you reacted to most, physically anyway, was what the superintendent said about cuts in Art, Music, and Physical Education specialists. Do you think there is something particularly ---

RYOR: I think there is. I think there is something particularly dangerous about an an attitude that develops and has developed over a period of years about things like Art, and Music and Physical Education being frills to an educational program. In any judgment and in the judgment of NEA, those matters are matters of the cultural heritage of this country, the soul of it, if you will, the physical well being and are absolutely critical, it seems to me, to the whole educational process. I think what many have suggested, that in a situation where cuts are necessary that there ought to be equity across that educational programs, I think it is unfair to label what we perceive to be a very important part of the educational program, the effective domain, the things that children learn because of music programs, because of the art programs, because of the drama programs. The things that generally go first need to stay.

MERROW: But that is an absolutely horrendous dilemma. I mean what would you cut instead of Art, Music and PE?

RYOR: Well, I would like us to quit talking about what we are going to cut and start talking about how we are going to solve the problem.

MERROW: Okay.

RYOR: I think once again what is important is to have national leadership that understands the problem of local school districts and of state financial situations and takes a look at the needs and re-orders the national priorities and helps the local taxpayer at the local educational system fundamentally operating in the way it ought to.

MERROW: Yes, but that is kind of begging the question. The national government, it has been said, moves with all the speed of a glacier unless something like pro football blackouts are involved.

RYOR: Well, I think we are moving toward that.

MERROW: But what can you do next year and the year after? Certainly the federal government is not going to intervene next year or the year after. And cuts have to be made. So there is the dilemma. What ought to be cut?

RYOR: I think they ought to be spread equally across the whole educational scene as opposed to setting aside certain areas as expendable.

MERROW: Are these political decisions?

RYOR: I think by and large they are. They are boards of education who make them. There are, of course teacher education associations in most of the cities that you have mentioned which advocated for the teacher members and are very concerned about maintaining a whole program for the children, I think who have great impact on how those decisions are made. I think by and large the final decision rests with the local board of education.

MERROW: Earlier we heard the superintendent of Compton say that it is essentially enrichment programs that are getting cut. That is really my question to you. Is it the programs for the kids with special needs, either specially gifted or with special disadvantages?

RYOR: Of course those are going as well. When we talk about the programs for gifted children or the compensatory programs for children who are educationally behind, they are also programs that are cut first. But many of those programs came about in the late '60's and were financed by federal, again, federal moneys which all of a sudden dried up. The school district found itself within additional burden of trying to find moneys for much-needed special programs. And when hard times come, when a tax levy goes down, then the first impulse is to cut back on those programs.

MERROW: An issue that has come up in Columbus and I gather is coming up in many places across the country is desegregation. Let's talk about desegregation from a financial point of view. Does it cost money to desegregate?

RYOR: Well, I think the answer to that is yes, but you have to look at that in balance against what it costs not to desegregate. I think a great deal of the alienation in this society has come out of the Ghetto concept, whether it is "ghetto-izing" blacks or Irish Catholics or whatever ethical group. I think in the long haul that does not serve the best interests of our nations's goals nor of public education.

MERROW: So you are saying even though desegregation costs money, it is money well spent that should be spent.

RYOR: I believe it is. I think it is a major problem that has to be dealt with, that we commited ourselves to in this country in 1954. It is obviously not completed.

MERROW: But it does in fact exacerbate school's financial problems.

RYOR: It does indeed because again you are talking about the additional costs of moving children from school district, from one school to another. That causes additional cost. The kind of human relation programs that are required in order to help teachers and children and often times parents in the community understand different cultures, different commitments, different values systems and develop a respect for those differences.

MERROW: Also, school districts inevitably incur large legal costs because they seem to anyway, inevitably fight desegregation for as many years as possible.

RYOR: That is true. That is true.

MERROW: Let's go a little bit north now to a report on school financial problems in Madison, Wisconsin.

POWELL: So far this school year there have been no teachers' strikes in Wisconsin like the bitter Hortonville strike which gained national attention last year. The state's largest system, Milwaukee, is now on a two-year contract, one after a strike last winter which lasted several days. However, five relatively large Wisconsin systems have master contracts which expire at the end of the calendar year. Only one of these communities, Sheboygan, has reached settlement. The others, including Madison, are still negotiating. And in Madison there is little evidence of progress toward a settlement. Despite an enrollment decline of about 300 from last year's total of about 31,000, the Madison school district budget will go from about $51,000,000 this year to about $55,000,000 next year. I asked Madison school superintendent Douglas Ritchie if any factors beside inflation have caused the budget to increase in spite of enrollment decline.

RITCHIE: Perhaps the greatest expenditure falls in the area of individualising instruction, bringing instruction into a focus for every individual child according to the individual's needs rather than teaching by a, I guess you would call it a group method. We used to teach the same thing to everyone regardless of their level of ability or their acheivement level at the time. Now we tailor make our programing even to the extent of -- will in six elementary schools, for example, we teach with a computer now, particularly in mathematics. That is broadening and expanding and is also testing out to be extremely effective. It is just a much more comprehensive and also, of course, more expensive program.

POWELL: Have you been faced with cutbacks like cutting down the temperature, cutting out teacher aids, cutting out school supplies. Just how bad is the economic crunch right now?

RITCHIE: Yes, we have done all of those things. The 1976 budget, calendar year, that budget will be the lowest or tightest budget in the Madison public schools probably since in the 1940's. Because you see, after the war there was significant growth also and it is very easy for a school district to grow. As enrollment goes up there is a perfect justification to add staff, to add buildings, to add, add, add. It takes a different set of managerial skills to decline. We are finding that the declining enrollment situation is much more difficult to administer than an increasing enrollment situation. Yes, this will be the tightest budget year in 1976 that the school system has known probably for over 25 years.

POWELL: Is this a universal situation as far as you know?

RITCHIE: Yes, pretty much that in scope. There are certain communities that are still isolated from it because of their tremendous financial base in the country. But it is not a local phenomenon.

It is national in scope. The expectation is that it will get to be worse.

POWELL: John Mathews is the Director of Madison Teachers Incorporated Madison's teacher union which is affiliated with the National Education Association. I asked Mathews what the teacher's ultimate salary goal is.

MATHEWS: I think right now if the teachers were being paid in the area of $24,000 or $25,000 per year they would be compensated much like city officials and bank officials and so forth who have similar responsibilities.

POWELL: That is a good doubling of the current rate. Is there really any chance of that happening given the tax picture, the economic problem?

MATHEWS: Well, I think there is when people start shifting their priorities. We have a massive defense budget, massive budgets in other federal and state and even local programs which, if the emphasis is really on developing children to be the productive citizens of society, then I think that those changes could come about. But it is going to be a rather lengthy process to get that far down the road.

POWELL: While it would be an exaggeration to say that Madison teachers or students have suffered greatly, it is safe to predict that the system will continue to suffer from an economic climate that will make it difficult to meet the increasing demands on the system. For National Public Radio this is John Powell reporting from Madison, Wisconsin.

RYOR: When Mr. Mathews talked about reordering our national priorities, reordering our priorities period, we spend more for dog food every year than we do text books. We pay Veterinarians twice as much to train and take care of pets than we do teachers to shape the minds of children. Now those are value questions that society at large has never come face to face with.

MERROW: And you would like to see that happen?

RYOR: I think it must happen.

MERROW: Making value decisions, is there anything on the horizon that is likely to force Americans to make value decisions about, for example, spending more on dog food than we spend on text books?

RYOR: I think so but by and large those are political decisions.

MERROW: What about cutting interscholastic athletics? They benefit very few people.

RYOR: This is true.

MERROW: Although they are highly visible and perhaps very popular. It might be a politically impossible, but perhaps economically sound thing to cut.

RYOR: That has been a very emotional issue. In a number of cases that is the last thing to go. The people value their sports teams even more than the mathematics program. That is an unfortunate indictement of the times, I think.

MERROW: Would you prefer to see the cuts come in interscholastic athletics?

RYOR: I would prefer to see them come equally, to see them, as I said earlier, come equally. And they are not generally treated

equally.

MERROW: Mr. Pyor, later in the program we will hear about a city school district whose superintendent has recommended cutting inter-schclastic sports.

RYOR: I haven't heard that but odds are he was fired.

MERROW: In fact, he is very new on the job. He just came in a few months ago. Lets go now and hear that report on the schools in Montgomery County, Maryland.

BERNARDO: We anticipate that due to under-budgeting for utilities, which was a decision of the County Council, and due to a projected expenditure overrun in transportation primarly because of increased gasoline costs, projected total overrun expenditure is $3,130,939.

SUGHRUE: School superintendent Charles Bernardo says this year's deficit is beyond administrative control. There is no fat in the $230,000,000 budget to be trimmed, no surplus of funds. Bernardo has already paid cuts totaling $991,000. They include a hiring freeze, energy-saving measures, cuts in out-of-county travel and higher fees for the use of school facilities by community groups. That still leaves the schools over $2,000,000 in the red. The county said "no" to Bernardo's request for more funds, saying it's run out of money. He came up with more cuts; lay off 400 teacher aids, eliminate spring sports, lower building temperature to 65, and more totaling one and a half million dollars. Bernardo opposed these cuts, however, saying they will have a direct impact of the students and are, as he put it, educationally irresponsible.

BERNARDO: Affecting the terms, hours, and conditions of employment of an individual employee in mid-stream, especially at this time of year, is a terrible thing to have to do to people. It impacts directly upon instruction for the first time in the area of equipment and supplies. And there is no question but that services and the quality and quantity of services will be reduced substantially if you have 400 fewer workers in the system. With regard to the elimination of interscholastic athletics, I think that is one of the most terrible elements of this entire package because of the tremendous values, I think, that accrue to youth by virtue of participation.

SUGHRUE: Enrollment in Montgomery county schools, now at 121,000, has been declining since 1972. The school system which used to grow by five or six thousand a year has lost over two thousand students since last year. The county spends over $1,700 on each student, the highest such expenditure in the state of Maryland. Montgomery County teachers are also among the most qualified and best paid in the state. Over 70 per cent have Masters Degrees and salaries for the school year average over $14,000. But as enrollment shrinks, so does the number of teachers. Betty Culotta is President of the Montgomery County Education Association, which represents the 12,000 school system employees. She says the superintendent should cut services, not people from the budget.

CULOTTA: In a humane business such as education, a human resource industry in other words, only human beings generally deliver the services. So that when you deal with the possibility of cutting people who work daily with children and teachers at the school level, you are talking about cutting a very basic service. So we have been opposed and continue to be opposed to any lay-offs of school personnel to buy the school system budget deficit.

SUGHRUE: Some 3,000 community groups from Boy Scouts to the elderly use the public schools. They are unhappy about having to come up with a quarter of a million dollars to pay for that privilage. Students

are upset about the elimination of sports and about other changes in the school day they feel will limit their freedom of choice. Both superintendent Bernardo and teacher's President Culotta say the county's priorities should be reassessed to put education back at the top of next year's budget.

BERNARDO: I would expect that some agencies would receive less that a three per cent increase in order that we may receive more. I know that that sounds terribly selfish but my role, by statute, is as an advocate of increased educational opportunities for youth. I want to avoid, if at all possible, the needless rape of the school system in terms of the tremendous gains that have been made here. I would hate to think that I have been brought in here to preside over the incipient decline of one of the finest school systems in the nation.

SUGHRUE: For National Public Radio, this is Karen Sughrue.

MERROW: Maybe you would comment on the politics of that superintendent. Now he asked us not to think he was selfish when he asked for three per cent increases for other employees and a larger one for teachers. It seems to me that you could make a pretty strong argument that he is being selfish.

RYOR: Well, I don't think he said it that way. I think he said three per cent for other segments of government and a larger increase for schools. That doesn't necessarily mean for teachers. It means for the program, for the restoration of many of the things that superintendent Bernardo alluded to. I agree with President Colatta of the Montgomery County Education Association. I don't believe that teachers ought to be required to subsidise education in the county.

MERROW: Mr. Ryor, we have listened now to reports from five districts across the country. Certainly some general themes have emerged on the basis of these discussions; class size, inflation, the rising fall costs, a number of unsettled contracts, just the general budget crunch, budget crisis all across the country. I want to question you on two areas: all this concern about money, does money really make a difference in the education of children?

RYOR: I think, one, money does make a difference in the education of children. I think there are statistics that demonstrate that in the financing, particularly when it is really divergent as it is in many instances, as I pointed out earlier in Kentucky with $891 per child as opposed to New York State with $2,100. But I think whether or not this country is commited to erasing those financial inequities, it is pretty clear that we are not going to be able to deal with many of the needs, the compensatory needs, particularly of our large urban areas unless we do adjust the expenditures of those funds and bring a little more equity to that situation.

MERROW: You seem to be calling for some minimum national standards of education.

RYOR: I think not only the minimal national standard of education, I think the minimal national standard of financing education, because I don't think we are going to be able to relieve those inequities in the quality without relieving the inequities in the way the money is distributed. I think that is a theme that runs through every single interview that was conducted here. And it is very important for us to look at that. I think if there is one thing that is good about all that is happening here, it is the focus of attention on the needs of public education, and to create a situation in which parents and teachers must talk to each other and must look at the quality of the funds and must look at what we really believe.

MERROW: I am glad you turned to the good news. We get complaints sometimes that we don't bring good news.

RYOR: Because I think until we can agree upon what we mean by our goals and what we mean when we set educational standards, I don't believe we are going to be able to achieve that quality education that we keep talking about. Because until we agree on those things, we are not going to get what we want, even when we all want pretty much the same thing, parents and teachers. I suspect parents want their children capable and productive and able to move in this society as productive citizens.

MERROW: You are clearly calling for a dialog between teachers and parents. What about action, what about concerted action, parents and teachers joining together to fight these cuts. Do you think that will work?

RYOR: I think that will work and that is absolutely necessary. But that is, I think, at the same time a by product of the discussion itself.

MERROW: Mae West once said "I have been rich and I have been poor and rich is better." But the thrust of all these reports is that the schools are getting poorer. The thrust also is that things are going to get worse before they get better. Is that your prognosis?

RYOR: Well, she is right, rich is better, I think. But that is a prognosis. I think up until about 1980, then the student population according to our projections as well as the teacher population will again move up. Again, a great deal of that is hooked to our economy and our capacity, the capacity of the federal administration to turn this whole thing around.

MERROW: So even though we ask you for some good news, the prognosis is really bad news.

RYOR: Bad news in the sense that there will be fewer children, fewer teachers and probably larger classes for a while but good news in as much as on the horizon I think there are potential solutions and there is reason for hope. Given the alternative, despair, I'll opt for hope any day.

MERROW: Thank you very much, John Ryor, President of the National Education Association. I am John Merrow.

BLAIR: Material for this report on school budget cuts around the country was supplied by Doug Culver, John KVASNOSKY, Kathleen Allen, John Powell, and Karen Sughrue.

MERROW: I want you to tell me everything you know about Santa Claus.

CHILD: That he flies around in this sleigh with a big bag of toys and has this black belt around his fat waist.

MERROW: When does he come?

CHILD: Oh, he comes on December 25, 1975. I know. He is real.

MERROW: Have you ever gone down to the city and seen people dressed up as Santa Claus on the street corner or in the window or something in a store? Is that the real Santa Claus?

CHILD: No. He doesn't live down here. He lives very far away.

BLAIR: We sent Connie Goldman out on the trail of Santa Claus and while she did not get quite as far North as this young man suggested, she did find someone who looked like the real thing in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

GOLDMAN: Is there something you want from Santa for Christmas? Oh, come on, you can tell. You can tell. I will bet you know what you want, huh?

CHILD: You huh.

SANTA: What?

CHILD: A racing car.

SANTA: Boy, that will be neat, huh?

GOLDMAN: So you are Santa Claus.

SANTA: Yes, I am.

GOLDMAN: How old are you?

SANTA: Nineteen years old.

GOLDMAN: How does a nineteen-year old have enough wisdom, charm and poise to become a Santa Claus?

SANTA: The reason I decided to become a Santa Claus is because I have done a lot of things with kids before. And just working with kids is the best thing that you can have.

GOLDMAN: Aren't they ever afraid of you with that big white beard?

SANTA: They sure are. In fact yesterday I had five kids that cried in a row and wasn't anything I could do. But there is an age bracket like between one and half and two and a half where almost every kid does cry and you have to work with them very carefully. You can't have a deep stern voice like Santa is supposed to be. You have to be kind of soft and affectionate like mother would be.

GOLDMAN: What about the discomfort of the costume?

SANTA: To me, once I get the costume on there is no discomfort at all because I become Santa Claus.

GOLDMAN: How much padding do you have to carry around? How much does it weigh?

SANTA: Just one pillow. It is just a regular pillow. And the thing you have to be careful of is so it doesn't buckle so you can't tell, that it sticks out. The easiest way, I just put my arms on my belt and you can't really tell then.

GOLDMAN: Have any old pros taught you some tips on being a better Santa Claus?

SANTA: No, I really taught myself. The biggest thing involved in being Santa Claus is getting along with the kids and not making them scared of you.

GOLDMAN: Are you ever put in a position where you promise some child some special gift for Christmas?

SANTA: You never promise. You never ever promise a child a gift because of the fact that you never know if mom is going to get them the gift or not. So I have to make up things. Like I say, well, maybe Santa Claus is going to have to go up to the North Pole and talk about it with his elves. Then they understand. I say is that okay with you and they also understand.

GOLDMAN: Let's hear your Santa voice.

SANTA: This is my Santa voice right hear "Say is there anything you want from Santa for Christmas."

CHILD: Some clothes.

SANTA: Okay, pretty ones too, huh? Yeah, sure. Say, would you do me a big favor?

CHILD: What?

SANTA: Get your arm around me here.

GOLDMAN: Thank you very much, Santa Claus.

MERROW: Why does he come?

CHILD: To give the children presents. I don't believe it is him that gives you presents. I believe it is your relatives and friends that give you presents.

MERROW: You mean you don't think Santa Claus really comes?

CHILD: Well, I know Santa Claus comes or not really. Santa Claus is a man who comes in a disguise as Santa Claus because he even came to my house once, a man in disguise as him. Only I don't believe there is a Santa Claus.

GOLDMAN: What is the most interesting part of the job?

SANTA: The most interesting part for me is changing clothes. When I come up, I change and I come out and all of a sudden there is all these kids that are attracted to me. Then I change, I go back and change and come back in my regular clothes and I am nobody, all of a sudden.

CHILD: And I know that when he wants to go in the city he puts on his clothes and he doesn't put on his beard but his beard is real.

MERROW: Did you used to believe in Santa Claus?

CHILD: Yes, very much. I even was in this Christmas party and I saw Santa Claus. He was in this room and I saw him take off his beard and then I ran downstairs and said "Johnathan, Johnathan, Santa Claus can take off his beard."

BLAIR: What are the rewards of this kind of a job?

SANTA: I have come to believe in Santa Claus. With the kids, when they sit on my lap and they look, just the look they give me, you know, it is hard not to believe.

BLAIR: You are convinced he is there?

SANTA: Yeah. Well, maybe not walking around but he lives.

BLAIR: Kevin Thorson and Bill Linquist both go around disguised as college students except in December, the weeks before Christmas. When we sent Connie after this story we asked her to find out how people learn to become Santa Claus as part of our regular feature on "Learning to". Connie claims that she failed in the "How to" department, that what she really brought back has more to do with learning to believe and learning to have faith whether it be in Santa Claus or in a child's gift for imagining.

BLAIR: If you would like to transcript or a cassette please write to Options in Education, 2025 M. as in mother, Street, Northwest, Washington D. C., 20036. We are having a little Christmas sale of our own. Transcripts are now .25 rather than .50 and cassettes are available

at $4.00. That address again, Options in Education, 1015 W. as in Christmas street NW, Washington D. C., 20036.

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